

GRANDMOTHER HANDS ONE OUT

BY SEWELL FORD

WITHERBEE was tellin' me about it, comin' down on the eight-four the other mornin'. Now, as a rule I'd rather put in the time between Rockhurst-on-the-Sound and the Grand Central goin' through the mornin' paper. Not that Witherbee's such a punk converser; for he ain't: only his lines and mine don't run on the same levels.

Gettin' rung in as chairman of the entertainment committee over at the Country Club has changed Witherbee from a quiet, hard-pluggin' commuter, into a flashy, loud-talkin' near-sport of the kind that's more or less common, I expect, in most any suburban joint like ours.

Course, he's just begun to make money fast and easy, and these are the usual symptoms. But, say, some of these new recruits to the spender class are raw specimens, ain't they? You know. They've been brought up careful and strict, and they've begun life on little or nothin'; but when they fin'ly get things comin' their way and start scatterin' a late crop of wild oats, they generally want to advertise the fact. When they open a bottle they want to be sure there's some of the neighbors near enough to hear the cork pop.

That's Witherbee. And with him gettin' excited about droppin' his first hundred at auction bridge, and growin' eloquent in the smokin' car over what a head he was takin' to town as a souvenir of Founders' banquet night at the club, and between times gassin' about his golf, and how once he would have made the sixth hole in three if he hadn't sclafted his drive, and—well, I guess you can see where I'd play a thinkin' part when any such dialogue as that was bein' rehearsed.

Specially the golf part of it. Say, I ain't knockin' the game any. I shouldn't wonder but what it was all right, in its way. But how a bunch of scrubs such as we got out here can get together every mornin' and swap hot air about whether they're on or off their game, is a mystery to me. And, while Witherbee seems to be the most persistent gasser in the lot, I understand he can tear up more turf and get less distance than any duffer on the handicap list.

That's why I'm some surprised when he pikes into the train and camps down in a seat alongside of me.

BAH! he remarks grouchy. "Things do run rotten at times; eh, McCabe?"

"Depends on who's runnin' 'em," says I. "But, if this is some harrowin' tale about how you sliced into a trap, and then topped your next two drives, you'd better—"

"It isn't, though," chimes in Witherbee. "It's strictly domestic. Shorty, how are you off for grandmothers in your family?"

"Nary a one," says I.

"Then you're in luck," says he.

"I ain't so sure about that," says I.

"Yes, you are," insists Witherbee. "We have escaped so far; but now we're up against it. The youngsters' grandmother—Mrs. Witherbee's mother, you know—is due to arrive to-night."

"Oh, well," says I, "that'll please the kids, won't it?"

"No doubt," he admits. "And I suppose I oughtn't begrudge them that, either. I remember how tickled I used to be when mine came to visit me. Dear old soul, she was! Always brought a lot of sugar cookies and plum tarts for us children. And then the warm wool mittens and socks she used to knit for us! Good old Granny!"

"Well, what you beevin' about, then?" says I.

"But that was when I lived in the country, up in a little place in New Hampshire," says Witherbee, "where we had a big house, and lots of room, and—and nothing else doing. But here—well, it's different, you know."

"No place for a grandmother up at your house, eh?" says I.

"That's just it," says he. "Sounds rather selfish and crude, too; but, hang it all! that's the whole truth of the matter. Now, come, you know how we live, most of us? We're in a whirl of things,—dinners, dances, teas, club affairs, card parties, and so on. Almost every night of the week we're either out somewhere, or else we have a few friends in for dinner, with more or less things to drink, and probably a little game afterward. You know."

"And a grandmother wouldn't fit into the scheme, eh?" says I.

"Exactly," says Witherbee. "Somehow, this grandmother business seems out of date. But of course she's Jack's and Marjorie's grandmother, and Mrs. Witherbee's mother besides; so there's no dodging."

"Finicky old girl, is she?" says I.

"Why, I suppose she's bound to be," says he. "Grandmothers generally are. As a matter of fact, I don't know much about ours. I met Mabel when she was on East visiting, you know, and only saw her folks when I went out for the wedding. Pretty little place, it was, near Milwaukee; but dead slow, I judged. There's no grandfather, though. He died four years ago, when

little Marjorie was only a few days old; so we didn't go out then, of course. And since then her mother hasn't been East at all. She's coming now, though."

"Ah, cheer up!" says I. "Worse things than grandmothers can happen to folks."

"But what makes it devilish awkward just now," goes on Witherbee, "is that we're expecting my Cousin Sibyl too. She's rather a lively sort, you know,—stunning looker, lived all over the lot, had two husbands, travels with the smartest people, and so on. You understand. Thinks nothing at all of taking a cigarette with her coffee. Of course, we wouldn't mind; but what's grandmother going to say?"

"I get the picture," says I.

"It's extremely vivid to me," says Witherbee. "Why, the good soul would have a catfit and think we were all on the straight road to perdition. Mabel thinks a lot of the old girl, too. No, we can't stand for it. I'll wire Sibyl she'll have to put it off, and then we'll settle down for a month or so of the simple life. Oh, we've begun! Sent regrets to four affairs last night. I shall miss my Sunday morning golf, though. We'll have prayers in-



"That's Bully of You!" Says She.

stead, I presume. I've locked all the decanters away safe, and we've had the champagne glasses put on the back of the top shelf. Given up our best guest chamber to Grandmother, too, and had it all fixed up cozy, with old family portraits on the walls instead of sporting prints, and a couple of nice, easy rocking chairs. And that reminds me—fur lined house slippers. I should have brought those out yesterday. Oh, we'll be a gay household after Grandmother comes! It will be almost like going into mourning. But I hope I can get a message to Sibyl in time to head her off."

NOW, maybe you'll smile a little suspicious at this sketch of Witherbee's mental agony, you non-sportin' folks, that live so tame you could have a grandmother drop in on you any day without warnin'. But, believe me, he wa'n't throwin' any bluff about it. One of them old-fashioned Pie Belt consciences is hard to choke, and, while Witherbee'd done his best these last few years to make his take the count, it could still wobble into the ring for one more punch.

Not that he worked up any great sympathy from me. Most of these imitation highrollers give me a pain in the

neck,—tryin' to go the pace nights, when they know they've got to be on the job by nine o'clock next mornin'. So whatever thinkin' I did about Witherbee durin' the day only ended in a grin.

SEEMS, though, there was one more comin' to me before I was through; for that afternoon as I piles off the five-seventeen express at our station I notices a swell-lookin' lady gazin' sort of peevish up and down the platform, as if she was wonderin' why someone wa'n't there to meet her. She has a neat-lookin' maid with her, carryin' a swagger travelin' bag, and just as I'm sizin' the pair up casual the lady catches my eye.

"Pardon me," says she, "but do you happen to know which of those carriages is Mr. Witherbee's?"

"None of 'em, Ma'am," says I. "They're all public hacks, and a punk lot, at that."

"I should say so!" says she, glancin' critical at the boneyard exhibit, and then smilin' friendly at me. "But I presume I must trust myself in one of them."

"Not if you'll take a chance with me," says I. "I've got a little tin car over to the garage there, and I'm goin' right past Witherbee's."

"Why, that's bully of you!" says she. "I'm going to take you at your word, too."

So while she's givin' her trunk checks to the expressman I chases over for the runabout that I'd left for its weekly wash and polish, and inside of three minutes I has the lady loaded in beside me, with the maid on the rumble, and I'm off to deliver a surprise to the Witherbees. Course, after her first crack, I'd guessed who it must be.

"Evidently I was not expected on this train," she remarks. "I wonder if there are to be other guests?"

"One," says I. "Witherbee was tellin' me only this mornin'. They're lookin' for Grandmother, too."

"Who?" says she.

"The kids' grandmother," says I. "Nice old girl, I understand, but a little slow."

"Oh!" says she, turnin' quick and givin' me another one of them quizzin', friendly smiles.

And I could see then how it was Witherbee could get so enthusiastic over Cousin Sibyl. For, while this party in the chic travelin' costume wa'n't any Broadway showgirl type, and maybe wouldn't be just what I'd describe as a stunner, she sure was more or less pleasin' to look at. Kind of a dead ripe pippin too, if the few crowsfeet in the eye corners and the scattered threads of gray hair was any guide. But there was plenty of natural color in her cheeks, and her eyes was bright and snappy, and whether her dressmaker was responsible for her figure or not, it was some classy.

"Two husbands!" thinks I. "Well, she looks like she'd last out a couple more, providin' she don't hit up the cigarettes too hard."

Whether I ought to chatter away and let out any more or not, I didn't know; but I couldn't resist leakin' some.

"Witherbee," I goes on, "is sort of plannin' on goin' into retreat after Grandmother shows up."

"Really!" says she. "How is that?"

"Oh, cuttin' out all his sportin' capers that he thinks might shock the old lady," says I. "You know—cards, and booze, and Sunday golf. They're goin' to slow up on the social whizz, and give Grandmother a nice, quiet, restful time of it."

"Indeed?" says the lady, bitin' her upper lip to keep back a smile. "How very thoughtful! But I'm glad to hear there is a golf course near. That's fine! And how are the roads for motorin'?"

"Bang up," says I.

"Then I must see about hiring some sort of car," says she. "Great fun driving, isn't it? Nice little machine you have here. I've driven one like it. Have very much carbureter trouble, do you?"

Say, she was the real thing, alive every minute, and out for any kind of game there was goin'. But as I dropped her and the maid at Witherbee's I couldn't help remarkin':

"Well, my respects to Grandmother, if she's here."

"Oh, she's here, all right," says the lady, her eyes twinklin' roguish. And I wondered how she could tell.

LET'S see, that must have been last Friday, and I don't hear anything more of the Cousin Sibyl-Grandmother combination, or how they're gettin' on, until here yesterday afternoon about two P. M., when I'm called to the 'phone.

"That you, McCabe?" says someone in an excited, tremble voice I didn't recognize at first. "Well, this is Witherbee. And, say, for Heaven's sake tell me what's to be done when a person is arrested!"

"Eh?" says I. "Why, Witherbee! What have they run you in for?"

"No, no!" says he. "I haven't been arrested. It—it's Grandmother."

"Go on, stop your kiddin'!" says I.